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Input from the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development to the high-level political forum on sustainable development

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, as agreed at the third session of the Arab Forum, organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in Amman on 29 and 30 May 2016.

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Report of the 2016 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development Amman, 29 and 30 May 2016

[Original: Arabic]

I. Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and other Regional Coordination Mechanism members, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, organized the 2016 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development in on 29 and 30 May 2016.

2. The Forum is a high-level regional platform for dialogue and coordination of mechanisms for the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 15 September 2015 entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". Accordingly, at its twenty-eighth session in Tunis from 15 to 18 September 2014, ESCWA adopted resolution 314 (XXVIII) on the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development. In that resolution, it requested that the secretariat hold the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development periodically, in partnership with the League of Arab States and other organizations concerned with sustainable development, in order to prepare for the sessions of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to review the progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and to help launch regional partnerships to advance sustainable development in the Arab region. At its second meeting, held in Amman from 14 to 16 December 2015, the Executive Committee of ESCWA adopted resolution 322 recommending support for the Member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda. In that same resolution, it also requested the secretariat to hold the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and to monitor progress made in the Arab region towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, prepare regional reports, assist the countries of the region in integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into their development plans, support statistical systems and follow up at the regional level.

3. The 2016 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development builds on the success of the two previous Forum sessions, held in Amman in 2014 and in Manama in 2015, and the leadership role of ESCWA and its partners in promoting regional dialogue and consensus-building during Arab preparations for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

4. This year, the Forum focused on the following key issues:

(a) Promoting an understanding of the complementarity and interconnectedness of the four elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, so that Arab States can establish their priorities and pursue integrated development approaches in respect of planning, implementation, follow-up and review;

(b) Consideration of the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level, as well as setting

priorities and identifying obstacles to implementation and monitoring, and deciding how such obstacles should be addressed;

(c) Stressing that regional efforts must be consistent with and complement national planning and implementation efforts, with a view to accelerating implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(d) Setting forth the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing and following up on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reviewing the organizational aspects and future work of the Forum, and identifying ways to strengthen the Forum's role as an essential component of the regional institutional follow-up and review framework.

5. Extraordinary efforts are needed to deal with this extremely trying period in the Arab region. Thus, a key question posed by forum participants was how to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in conditions of occupation, war, conflict, migration, forced displacement and the destruction of natural resources, infrastructure, the economy, society and values. After discussion, they suggested that the question should be formulated in a positive way: is it possible to respond to conflict, war, occupation, scarce resources and inadequate management without implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development? Put that way, the participants thought that the 2030 Agenda was the means by which the prevailing reality could be changed.

6. The presentations made at the Forum, as well as the information set out in communications received from Member States in preparation for the Forum, showed that most Arab States had responded in various ways to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and had made effective contributions to the preparations leading up to the adoption of the Agenda, either through the active participation of the Group of Arab States in the work of the Open Working Group for the post-2015 agenda or through League of Arab States mechanisms and regional civil society consultations. Those efforts culminated in the convening of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development in Amman in 2014 and in Bahrain in 2015. In its resolution 631, the summit of the League of Arab States welcomed all the aforementioned efforts and requested the Secretariat of the League of Arab States to continue working with all partners, including United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, to support the efforts of Arab States to implement the Agenda by 2030.

7. Most Arab States are still seeking to develop institutional frameworks for preparing and adopting national sustainable development plans, frameworks that are nationally owned and led; achieve optimal results, so as to ensure inclusiveness, coordination and integration; and are close to decision-making centres and linked to national planning mechanisms and structures. This is also true for the review and follow-up mechanisms that are still being studied. This is to be expected, as the Agenda went into effect only recently, at the beginning of 2016. It is therefore unrealistic to expect quantitative monitoring of progress towards the goals and targets, particularly since the list of indicators has not yet been finalized. Arab States recognize the importance of strengthening the capacities of statistics organizations and improving the comprehensiveness and quality of data, as well as the methods for the collection and dissemination thereof. Two Arab States, Egypt and Morocco, have offered to be part of the first group of States to submit voluntary national follow-up reports to the high-level political forum for 2016.

8. Forum participants drafted a number of letters for submission to the high-level political forum on sustainable development that the Economic and Social Council will convene from 11 to 20 July 2016 under the theme "Ensuring that no one is left behind". The outcomes of the 2016 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development will be submitted to the twenty-ninth ministerial session of ESCWA in September 2016. In parallel to what is going on in other regions, the letters were drafted from the perspective of the Arab region and as a regional contribution to the formulation of global processes.

9. The messages that Forum participants decided to address to the high-level political forum on sustainable development covered the following aspects:

(a) The Arab perspective on global frameworks and processes;

(b) Cooperation and integration among States and partners in the Arab region;

(c) Implementation, follow-up and review at the national level;

(d) The Arab Forum on Sustainable Development

II. Key messages to the high-level political forum on sustainable development

The Arab perspective on global frameworks and processes

10. Achieving sustainable development in the Arab region and the meeting the requirements of this transformative Agenda require a change how development issues are addressed and in production and consumption patterns at the individual and community levels, and in choices and policies. Effecting such change is challenging, but the Arab States are truly committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda.

11. The Agenda is integrated, interlinked and indivisible. None of its four components, particularly the Preamble and the Declaration, should be overlooked, and all stages of planning, implementation and follow-up must be consistent. The 2016 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development emphasizes that, as stated in the Declaration, there are three interlinked and equally important universal challenges that must be addressed in a balanced and effective way, namely, peace and security; poverty and inequality; and environmental degradation, climate change and natural disasters. The Forum also emphasizes the importance of justice at the national, regional and international levels.

12. Human rights are the foundation of the 2030 Agenda and of development plans that leave no one behind. This commitment to human rights principles applies to all development stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society and governments. This commitment will have a direct impact at the national, regional and international levels when examining options and the trade-offs between benefits and the right to set policy. Innovative solutions and non-traditional policymaking are required, as well as a medium-term and long-term perspective when assessing feasibility and results.

13. The right to development is one of the fundamental rights enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and it applies to individuals, groups and peoples and countries. This is something that is very important, particularly with respect to the right to self-determination, sovereignty over natural resources and the right to freely choose national development paths and reject unilateral economic sanctions that obstruct development. This definition of the right to development, which dates back to 1986, is of vital importance to the Arab region and developing countries, and must be accorded the status it deserves.

14. Successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the concerted efforts of all national, regional and international development stakeholders. It also requires an international partnership based on respect, equality and commitment to the rights system and to the 2030 Agenda and its terms of reference. The Forum underlines the centrality of partnership among governments, civil society and the private sector as a key component of development and development work.

15. The cultural and political dimensions are two key components of the development process and of any development strategy, together with the economic, social and environmental dimensions. It is extremely important not to lose sight of these two dimensions in the contemporary world and in the Arab region in particular, given the complex cultural and political problems facing the region. Like the rest of the world, the Arab world has rich cultures and a vast heritage that should not be ignored. Indeed, they should serve as the basis for a better future for Arab peoples and the world.

16. It is also important not to ignore economic, social, demographic and geographical structural challenges, as create inequality and affect not only the performance levels of countries, but also the choices they make. All national development partners, including governmental and non-governmental organizations and the private sector, must work together in order to protect the national policy space, which is under pressure from globalization. Alongside the international obligation to respect State sovereignty and the provision of development aid, protecting the national policy space is a prerequisite for the right to development and the success of the national development strategy.

17. Global plans are only truly universal to the extent that they reflect and give expression to the critical issues affecting the countries of the various regions of the world. The practical application of the global agenda in any region must take into account regional and national priorities and the relevant issues — which, in the Arab world, are occupation, war and conflict and their repercussions — but without losing sight of such issues as poverty, inequality, demographics, environmental degradation, climate change and good governance.

Cooperation and integration among States and partners in the Arab region

18. The Arab region is suffering from acute and extremely difficult crises stemming from various wars and conflicts, including the continued Israeli occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories. Those crises have brought about material, economic and social destruction, moral decline and political collapse in a number of States. They have also created refugees, displacement, forced migration and humanitarian problems that have spread to other States in the region and to

neighbouring regions. Those crises need major attention in the form of humanitarian and development-oriented interventions that focus on the needs of women in armed conflict and based on true regional and international partnership.

19. Support should be provided for least developed countries and countries suffering from occupation, war, conflict and disasters, which include approximately half of the Arab States. The region cannot make progress on the path to development while half of it remains mired in conflicts that prevent it from even joining the development process. In order to push development forward in the Arab region, a qualitative breakthrough in development must be achieved in the least developed countries, something that can only happen if conflict, war, occupation and unilateral economic sanctions are brought to an end.

20. Goal 16 is crucial to the Arab region because it concerns security, peace and good governance, including combating corruption, modernizing administration and increasing transparency and access to information. There can be no security or peace without good governance, and vice versa. Human rights, good governance and an awareness of the interconnectedness of peace, security and sustainable development should all be at the heart of the transformative process in the region. We must also not overlook the international dimension of governance issues, including increased representation for developing countries in global structures, stemming the flow of arms and illicit financial flows, and the recovery of stolen assets.

21. The question of demographics is of paramount importance in the Arab region, where most countries are undergoing major demographic transformations. There have been unprecedented population movements caused by immigration, emigration, displacements and refugees, with all the attendant negative impacts on the lives of the migrants, displaced persons and refugees themselves. At the same time, there has been a natural change in demographic makeup caused by such factors as high birth rates. These dynamics highlight the need for a different approach that responds to the development needs of young people, who are a majority in many Arab countries, and the needs of other demographic groups identified in the 2030 Agenda, including children, elderly persons, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

22. Gender equality and women's empowerment should be urgent priorities for the Arab region. The gender gap is sizable in a number of areas, and indicators show contradictory trends. For example, while there have been improvements in participation rates, legislative development and education and health indicators, employment has stagnated or even shrunk. Widespread violence against women and girls has had a negative impact on the situation of women, and is indicative of a troubling regression in social and cultural norms. The Forum regarded closing the gender gap and empowering women in all areas to be success criteria for inclusive sustainable development.

23. Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals will require genuine and effective inclusion of women. The role played by women in all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals should be monitored with a view to making clear that they are not only victims but also contributors. Their role must be recognized and reflected in government policies, with special focus on the needs of women in armed conflict.

24. The well-being and prosperity of people should be the primary goal of economic development. Economic development should be linked to job creation, suitable working conditions, expansion of the economic development base to all regions and sectors, increased productivity and environmental protection. Ending unemployment and providing jobs, social protection and health care should be priorities in the Arab region, where rates of unemployment among youth, and especially young women, are the highest in the world.

25. Improving education at all levels, supporting scientific research and technology, and encouraging innovation should be major development priorities in the region, not only in order to develop human capital but also to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals.

26. Development planning should take into account the linkages among the goals relating to the environment, natural resources, climate change and economic and social objectives. Given the regional and cross-border nature of the water, energy, agriculture and food security challenges facing the countries of the region, cooperation must be stepped up to develop solutions and policies that ensure sustainable resources and a life of dignity for all. In that connection, we take note of the outcomes of the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly held in Nairobi from 23 to 27 May 2016 on the theme of "Delivering on the Environmental Dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

27. Disaster risk reduction and sustainable development are closely related. The Arab road map for implementing the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction should be put into effect through national strategies and frameworks for managing risk and building resilience with a view to reducing existing risks, averting new risks and ensuring sustainability. Doing so will require the creation of appropriate coordination and financing mechanisms.

28. Development should be funded from various national, regional and international sources. Given international trends, particularly the significant decrease in financing for development, it is imperative to find new ways to provide the necessary resources for implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

29. It is important to increase funding from within the region and to create a regional funding mechanism, such as an Arab fund or bank for reconstruction and sustainable development, without prejudice to the responsibilities of the international community, especially with respect to problems of which the international community is a major direct or indirect cause, such as climate change, the negative effects of global trading mechanisms and the outbreak of war, conflict and instability. In that regard, we stress the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

30. A genuine partnership must be created at the national and regional levels among the three partners in development: Governments, the private sector and civil society. The League of Arab States initiative for an "Arab decade for civil society" offers a good opportunity to develop, operationalize and expand the mechanisms and structures of such a partnership to include the private sector as an active partner in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals nationally and regionally.

Implementation, follow-up and review at the national level

31. The years 2016 and 2017 will be particularly important for making a strong start on adapting and implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national level. Countries should do the following:

- Start to incorporate all the components of the global Agenda;
- Start to set up institutional frameworks to take the lead in the development process;
- Devise approaches that adapt the Agenda's Goals and targets to national and regional particularities and priorities;
- Begin to develop national capacities;
- Begin to build consensus on review and follow-up mechanisms;
- Define the roles of various partners, in particular the regional organizations and the United Nations regional system, and create mechanisms to take advantage of expertise in different areas while preserving the integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals.

32. There is no one single formula for the institutional framework States must set up for the adaptation, planning, follow-up and implementation process in accordance with the general framework provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the obligations of States with respect to its principles and objectives. It is up to each State to find the institutional arrangement it deems suitable for the integrated nature of the Agenda and to create effective mechanisms for coordination and integration between the relevant government ministries and agencies and domestic and foreign partners, provided that such mechanisms are close to decision makers and decisions are made within an appropriate time frame.

33. The national institutional framework should allow for the participation of all relevant actors, including civil society, the private sector, research centres, consulting firms and other actors, and should make effective use of institutional, human, material and natural resources in managing the development process. It should eliminate any waste of such resources. Partnership is a fundamental principle of the Sustainable Development Agenda that should not be overlooked, especially since governments cannot implement national plans within the new global framework on their own.

34. More adequate national financial resources should be provided, financing-for-development partnerships should be enhanced and planning and management mechanisms should be linked to the public budgets and patterns of consumption and production in each country.

35. National ownership should be emphasized in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That will require sufficient political will, and also theoretical and technical expertise and partnerships to coordinate planning, resource allocation and implementation. High-quality and credible plans and strategies must be adopted by all parties concerned in order to increase the chances of success.

36. We stress the urgent need to strengthen the capacities of national parliaments to perform their legislative and supervisory roles effectively, and the need for access

to information in order to promote policy coherence and ensure transparency in government activities. That will require a qualitative leap in parliamentary action and effective partnership in all phases of implementation, follow-up and review.

37. In implementing the 2030 Agenda, the domestic level should be taken into account and awareness should be maintained of disparities among different regions within a single country. Improvements in national averages might not necessarily mean that all, and especially the groups and areas most in need, are being included. The comprehensive and inclusive nature of the Agenda means that progress must be measured among the most vulnerable, poorest and most marginalized demographic groups and geographical areas.

38. Alongside the commitment of member States to the principles, goals and means of implementation, we also stress the importance of follow-up and review. During the first phase, the focus should be on preparing the institutional framework and coordination and planning mechanisms at the national level, and then national and local plans should be integrated and harmonized. Also during that phase, the foundations should be laid for partnerships and mechanisms for the inclusion of all relevant actors and institutions, including parliaments. The complex and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets requires increased awareness at all levels, capacity-building for all relevant parties and the creation of appropriate financing mechanisms.

39. It is important to provide accessible data at the national and regional levels, which will require enhancement of the capacities of statistics bureaus in the Arab States.

40. National follow-up and review frameworks should include mechanisms for thorough, independent and transparent evaluation of policies and programmes, in order to measure impacts and outcomes, analyse progress and trends, identify obstacles and expedite implementation.

41. The Arab countries need to be part of the global follow-up and review processes. We commend the initiative of Egypt and Morocco in being among the first States to submit their national voluntary reviews to the 2016 high-level political forum on sustainable development.

42. States are in need of capacity-building and should be provided with technical support. United Nations agencies, regional organizations and development partners in the region should create a supportive environment not only for Governments, but for all parties involved, including parliaments and civil society organizations such as unions, professional associations, business organizations, associations of journalists and professionals, the private sector, universities and consulting firms.

The Arab Forum on Sustainable Development

43. The Arab Forum on Sustainable Development should be held on a regular basis. It should be organized in a participatory format and bring together Governments, community-based and regional organizations, civil society, the private sector, major groups and parliaments, with a view to ensuring that the relevant stakeholders for sustainable development in the Arab region work together in a complementary, interactive and cooperative fashion.

44. In order to prepare for the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, a comprehensive survey must be conducted of all the development activities carried out by the relevant regional and international organizations and the ministerial councils of the League of Arab States. The findings of such a survey would provide key inputs for the Forum and help to disseminate knowledge and promote integration and coordination.

45. The Arab Forum on Sustainable Development offers a framework for discussing transnational issues from a cross-sectoral perspective that encompasses governmental and non-governmental groups, civil society and the private sector. This framework must be strengthened.

46. The Forum is an appropriate context in which to consider voluntary national reports prior to their submission to the high-level political forum, if States wish to do so, in order to exchange national experiences, expertise and lessons learned.

47. The Forum is a regional platform that Arab States can use to consider the means, frameworks and mechanisms for follow-up and review of the sustainable development agenda that builds on existing regional initiatives and structures. It is the appropriate forum in which to review the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits regarding social, economic, environmental, demographic and other issues, and to present regional reports and build consensus regarding their themes. Those reports include regional sectoral reports on such transnational topics as water, food security and international migration, and comprehensive reports such as the Arab Sustainable Development Report.

48. Including the priorities of the region on the agenda of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in New York would ensure that efforts in the Arab region are in line with the agenda of the high-level political forum and complement the work being done in other regions.

49. United Nations organizations and international and regional organizations, including the League of Arab States, must be prepared to work in partnership, coordination and cooperation, so that they can provide technical or substantive support to the work of the Forum and ensure that it is convened on a periodic basis, thus helping the region make its voice heard in international forums.

50. It is important to establish mechanisms for coordination between United Nations organizations and other regional and international organizations and development actors in the region. Such mechanism would ensure that we are able to contribute effectively to capacity development by collecting data and developing knowledge tools that are consistent with the characteristics of the Arab region. It is also necessary to provide institutional and policy support, facilitate partnerships and strengthen the statistical capabilities of the countries of the region.

III. Proceedings of sessions and presentations

51. In addition to the opening and closing sessions, four sessions were held to review and discuss the following themes:

Session one: Understanding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Session two: Moving from commitment to action at the national level

Session three: Setting priorities and addressing regional challenges to achieving sustainable development goals

Session four: The way forward — working together to ensure no one is left behind

Opening session

52. Ms. Rima Khalaf, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Ms. Haifa Abu Ghazala, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and Mr. Imad Najib Fakhoury, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of Jordan, delivered addresses at the opening session.

53. Ms. Khalaf focused on the transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adding that she considered that to be a necessary condition of sustainability. She stressed the need for coherence between the global agenda and regional challenges and priorities, in particular the strong correlation between peace, poverty, inequality and global environmental degradation in the Arab region, which suffers greatly from occupation, wars and conflicts, and the resulting refugee situations, displacement, killing and destruction of wealth and opportunities. She also emphasized the importance of the Global Partnership for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the importance of partnership among Governments, regional civil society organizations and with the private sector, and the responsibility of the United Nations and ESCWA to encourage the creation of spaces for dialogue and promote the use existing spaces.

54. Ms. Abu Ghazala spoke about Arab preparations for the 2030 Agenda in previous years, in particular the activities organized by League of Arab States or in which the League participated at the ministerial level and other levels, and recalled the mixed results of efforts to realize the Millennium Development Goals. She noted that the Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, at their meeting in Cairo in April 2016, had discussed the social component of the 2030 Agenda and had decided to launch the "Arab decade for civil society", which the League believes offers an opportunity to elevate the partnership between civil society and Arab Governments.

55. Mr. Fakhoury stressed that the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development had an important role to play in ensuring that the Arab region is able to keep pace in the new phase of global development, which builds on what has been achieved internationally, regionally and nationally in economic, social and environmental affairs. He noted that this requires the development of an Arab road map for the implementation process that is based on the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development and on regional priorities and national challenges. He added that opportunities for cooperation between Arab countries grew out of effective partnership among Governments, the public and private sectors, and civil society organizations. He also emphasized the importance of monitoring and evaluation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Session one: Understanding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

56. The objective of this session was to provide an overview of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to look at its specific components. The

participants heard a presentation on the national experiences of Morocco and the Sudan, and two presentations on the correlation between the components of the 2030 Agenda, the first on the correlation between poverty, growth and employment, and the second on the environment.

57. The session was chaired by Mr. Ahmad Qatarneh, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Environment of Jordan. The session was addressed by Ms. Roula Majdalani, Director, Sustainable Development Policies Division, ESCWA; Mr. Mustafa Abdali, Office of the High Commission for Planning, Morocco; Mr. Abbas Koriena Mohamed Elawad, Secretary-General of the National Council for Strategic Planning of the Ministry of Presidential Affairs of the Sudan; Mr. Khalid Abou Ismail, Chief, Economic Development and Poverty Section, ESCWA; and Ms. Melanie Hutchinson, Regional Development Coordinator, Regional Office for West Asia, United Nations Environment Programme.

58. Ms. Majdalani gave the keynote presentation, which focused on the developments that had led to agreement on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. She reviewed the four components of the 2030 Agenda — the Declaration, the Goals, means of implementation and follow-up and review — and emphasized that they were interconnected. She added that no component may be overlooked and underscored the correlation between the Sustainable Development Goals. Ms. Majdalani then reviewed the most prominent challenges to sustainable development in the Arab world and emphasized the role of ESCWA in supporting efforts aimed at achieving sustainable development.

59. Mr. Abdali presented the experience of Morocco with regard to sustainable development and spoke about the steps taken by the Moroccan Government during the preparation of its voluntary report, which will be submitted this year to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. He explained the consultative process by which Morocco had developed a methodology for addressing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That methodology calls for goals and targets to be grouped in accordance with the five components of the Preamble, namely, people, the planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, and for those goals and targets to then be redistributed on the basis of the core values of the 2030 Agenda. He added that Morocco had conducted a comprehensive survey of its sectoral policies and assessed their compatibility with the themes of the 2030 Agenda, in preparation for the next phase of the integration of the 2030 Agenda into national planning.

60. Mr. Elawad said that the Sudan considered the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want as the frameworks of its development policies. Accordingly, his country continued to use the planning mechanisms already in place, but it had harmonized the national development plan with those frameworks. He outlined the governing principles for determining national priorities and explained that the Sudan has taken practical steps to form national committees and institutional frameworks that will follow up national progress at all levels in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

61. Mr. Abu Ismail provided a practical example of the linkage between the fight against poverty, economic growth and employment in the Arab region, explaining the virtuous cycle that results from this linkage and its relevance to the main challenges facing the Arab region, which suffers from high unemployment, weak economic participation and lack of decent work conditions. In that connection, he noted that poverty has not declined during the past two decades in most Arab

countries. Mr. Abu Ismail said that the average poverty rate (lower line) in the region stood at 20 per cent, and the unemployment rate was 12 per cent, the highest in the world. Meanwhile, unemployment among young people stood at 40 per cent and women's share of the labour force was only 21 per cent, the lowest rate in the world. Fragmented efforts and the apparent lack of coherence among the different goals, targets and dimensions had resulted in failure to achieve the desired outcomes in the previous phase.

62. Ms. Hutchinson addressed the environmental component of the 2030 Agenda. She highlighted the interconnection among the Sustainable Development Goals by drawing attention to the link between the goal on sustainable consumption and production and the other 12 Sustainable Development Goals. She underscored that it was possible to address the myriad issues related food security, including the persistence of hunger despite the availability of enough food for all, volatility in food prices, increased consumption of natural resources, food loss and waste, by developing coherent solutions. Ms. Hutchinson also drew attention to the challenge posed by the tendency for decision makers to assign greater importance to the economic aspects of sustainable development, at the expense of the other aspects; to view environmental protection as a burden, not as an opportunity; and to consider security and peace as being separate from development. She spoke about ways of effecting the change needed to make a true shift towards sustainable development, including the adoption of an integrated and balanced approach to sustainable development; changing prevailing ideas; removing institutional barriers that promote a sectoral approach instead of an integrated approach; strengthening synergies among the various financing mechanisms available for the various Sustainable Development Goals; establishing partnerships; and developing innovative strategies.

Session two: planning and implementation at the national level

63. The second session was chaired by Ambassador Majdi Radi, Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, and was addressed by Ms. Nathalie Bouché, Team Leader, Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development, Regional Centre for Arab States, United Nations Development Programme; Mr. Adib Ni'meh, Regional Advisor for the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA; Mr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director, United Nations Population Fund; Ms. Nihal El Megharbel, Vice-Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform of Egypt; Ms. Inaya Zidan, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics; Mr. Ziad Obeidat, Director, Development Plans and Programmes, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Jordan.

64. Ms. Bouché gave a presentation on the tools available for integrating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into national plans. She reviewed some of the tools that the United Nations Development Group and the United Nations Development Programme had produced, including the guidance note for United Nations country teams. Those tools incorporated a three-step approach consisting of mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support strategy. Ms. Bouché also said that the United Nations Development Programme had prepared Goal-specific guidance papers.

65. Mr. Ni'meh presented a comparison of the Millennium Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, noting that the 2030 Agenda is

more complex than the Millennium Development Goals and is being implemented in a more complex international environment. He spoke about the global nature of the 2030 Agenda and its indivisibility, and the consistency between the five dimensions of sustainable human development, namely, the economic, social, environmental, political and cultural, on the one hand, and the global plan, the characteristics of the region, national goals and ends and means, on the other. He also presented a methodology for breaking down the Goals and reorganizing them in the context of the national adaptation process, while maintaining their integration and interdependence.

66. Mr. Shabaneh spoke about the importance of demographic issues in the Arab countries, particularly the issue of youth, who make up a large proportion of the population. He said that this issue is of the highest priority because most countries are in the early stages of the demographic transition or in the stages immediately preceding it. Mr. Shabaneh focused on the serious challenges facing the region, such as asylum, displacement due to wars and conflicts and various forms of migration, including rural-urban migration, in pursuit of job opportunities and a better life. He also drew attention to the relationship between population dynamics and economic and social dynamics. The manner in which those dynamics played out could lead either to improved development opportunities, if appropriate policies were in place, or to increased inequality, if population issues were not addressed.

67. Ms. El Megharbel gave a presentation on the experience of Egypt in planning and drafting "Egypt Vision 2030", and what Egypt had done to ensure that its vision is aligned with the 2030 Agenda. She explained that Egypt has begun drafting the national development plan for 2030 some three years ago, that is, before the adoption of the global sustainable development agenda. The plan, which was developed using national planning mechanisms, drew on a national database and was the product of a consultative process in which all relevant ministries, partners and experts participated. Comprehensive in nature, the plan included goals, quantitative achievements, indicators and monitoring and follow-up mechanisms. After the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015, the Egyptian Government sought to harmonize national goals and targets with the global goals and targets. It also strengthened the national planning process by broadening the consultative process, in order to harmonize the global and national plans.

68. Ms. Zidan spoke about the lack of data and ways of addressing that problem, future trends and follow-up mechanisms. She stressed the importance of aligning indicators for the Arab region with global indicators and the need to identify the priorities of each State. Decision makers and statistical offices could not agree on priorities, and there was little cooperation, coordination and genuine partnership among all parties in respect of data provisioning. The various data producers failed to adhere to international standards, classifications and definitions. In addition, some of the indicators did not apply to certain States.

69. Mr. Obeidat, recounting the experience of Jordan, said that the "Jordan 2025" strategy is based on a long-term vision. The strategy is broad and flexible and is based on three-year operational development plans. The comparison and harmonization process had begun and was the first step towards integration of the global goals into the national strategy. The process, which took into account national priorities, was being carried out with the assistance of the relevant

ministries and other partners. This methodology would ensure greater cohesion between the goals and targets, on the one hand, and budgets, on the other, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving the goals and targets. It would also help to identify funding gaps, so that efforts could be made to seek other sources of funding, including international assistance. Awareness-raising and communications are also important components of the operational plans.

Session three: development challenges at the national level

70. The third session was a moderated discussion with Member States on regional priorities; issues specific to the Arab region and their impact on sustainable development; and the role of partnership and cooperation among the States of the region in the implementation of the sustainable development goals and in the follow-up and review process.

71. The session was chaired by Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari, Deputy Executive Secretary for Programmes, ESCWA. The session was addressed by Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief, Food and Environment Policies Section, ESCWA; Mr. Fateh Azzam, Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship, American University of Beirut; and Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director, Arab NGO Network for Development.

72. Ms. Nejdawi reviewed the most significant findings of the first Arab Report on Sustainable Development, which include increased poverty rates, weak social protection systems, poor food availability because of restricted food production, water scarcity and land degradation. She also spoke about other critical issues that affect the Arab region, such as violence and instability, which constituted one of the greatest obstacles to achieving sustainable development, adding that, in 2014, there were approximately 11 million refugees and 15 million displaced persons in the Arab region. Ms. Nejdawi stressed that efforts to address those issues must be guided by respect for the dignity and well-being of humans, and must be aimed at creating sustainable and resilient societies, and establishing peace. She also emphasized the importance of regional action to implement the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region and the need to establish good governance, promote transparency, accountability and the rule of law, and foster community participation in order to respond to the myriad challenges posed by weak institutions. It was imperative to pursue integrated planning; improve coordination mechanisms; make use of modern tools, such as modelling; link science with policy; harmonize financing with sustainable development needs; and improve data collection and processing capacity, with a view to formulating effective, evidence-based policies. She emphasized the need to build human capacity and improve research and development, and added that concerted efforts were required by all development partners from the public and private sectors, civil society organizations, academia and the media, all of which had an equally important role to play.

73. Mr. Azzam drew attention to the need to adopt a rights perspective in every aspect of global and national development plans. It was not enough to become a party t. the international human rights instruments, something which most Arab countries had done. States must truly comply with those instruments by reviewing their national laws and harmonizing them with human rights laws. He said that the participation of civil society in the development process and in policymaking in the

Arab region remains weak at the national and regional levels, and stressed the need to increase and institutionalize the participation of civil society in regional and national institutions, in order to increase the likelihood of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

74. Mr. Abdel Samad spoke about the contributions of civil society organizations to Arab preparations for the post-2015 development agenda at the regional and international levels. He noted that civil society was calling for the adoption of a new development model at the global level that takes into account the need to address the structural imbalances in the world economy that generate inequality. Some progress had been made with regard to partnership between governments and civil society. The League of Arab States initiative to organize the "Arab decade of civil society" is a positive step that must be built upon. He stressed the importance of the private sector's commitment to the human rights system, and the importance of protecting the national policymaking space through the solidarity of all parties involved in national development. Governments must commit to formulating development plans in a participatory manner that protects the interests of all population groups. He also stressed the importance of Goal 16, which concerns peace and governance, to the Arab region and the importance of reforming tax policy in order to reduce inequality.

75. This session reviewed the outcomes of previous meetings on the global sustainable development agenda:

(a) Ms. Ghada Wali, Minister of Social Solidarity of Egypt and Head of the Executive Bureau of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, presented the outcomes of the ministerial-level conference on the theme of "Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Arab States: the social dimensions", which was held in Cairo on 6 and 7 April 2016;

(b) Ms. Adala Atira, Head of the Environmental Quality Authority of the State of Palestine and representative of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, presented the outcomes of the preparatory meeting for the 2016 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, which were held in Beirut on 14 April 2016;

(c) Ms. Ikhlas Aranki, Assistant Director General of the Department of Statistics of Jordan and member of the Arab technical working group on population indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals, reviewed the outcomes of the meeting that the group held in Cairo on 11 and 12 May 2016;

(d) Overview of regional issues related to the role of civil society in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the outcomes of the Arab Conference on the Role of Civil Society in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was held in Doha on 20 and 21 April 2016.

Session IV: The way forward — working together for inclusive sustainable development

76. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director, United Nations Population Fund, and the speakers were Ms. Nada El-Agizy, Director for Sustainable Development and International Cooperation at the League of Arab States, and Ms. Karima El-Korri, Chief of the Population and Social Development

Division and head of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Unit at ESCWA.

77. Ms. El-Agizy discussed the challenges that impede development in several Arab countries, as well as the role of the Secretariat of the League of Arab States in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. She pointed to the need to support Arab development efforts and to set out a unified Arab vision on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals by fostering cooperation with Arab and international stakeholders. This would have a positive impact on citizens and their standard of living. Ms. El-Agizy also stressed the importance of outreach to civil society organizations and the private sector as key development partners. She pointed out that the Secretariat of the League of Arab States had taken the initiative to establish a sustainable development and international cooperation department to respond to the needs of Arab countries and strengthen cooperation with regional and international organizations.

78. Ms. El-Korri gave a presentation on the follow-up and review process and its national, regional and global dimensions, with a focus on the principles of national ownership, inclusiveness, participation, transparency and the achievement of results. She also focused on national review mechanisms and the drafting of thematic and regional reports. She touched upon the role of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development as a regional platform that can facilitate dialogue among various stakeholders and bring consistency to regional policy and approaches aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda. Ms. El-Korri stressed the importance of follow-up and review in awareness-raising, advocacy, experience-sharing, providing data and improving the quality thereof, and analysing progress made so that achievements can be assessed, obstacles identified and implementation accelerated. She provided an overview of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held in New York in July 2016, to which the findings and recommendations of the regional forums will be submitted, including the key messages from the 2016 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development.

Closing session: key messages

79. The 2016 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development closed with the messages adopted by the Forum, which reflect the views and experiences of participants, as well as the achievements made by the States of the region and the challenges they continue to face. Participants agreed on these messages in full, and they are included in the present report on the 2016 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, which will be submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in New York.

IV. Participants

80. The Forum was attended by 151 high-level participants, including representatives of ESCWA, the organizing body; the League of Arab States; the United Nations Environment Programme; the United Nations Population Fund, the Regional Coordination Mechanism; the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation; and representatives from United Nations bodies and programmes, international organizations, the private sector, major regional groups,

sustainable development stakeholders in the Arab region and a number of Arab parliamentarians.

81. In addition to a representative from the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, a total of 53 delegates from 16 Arab countries participated. Fifteen of these countries were members of ESCWA: Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Tunisia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, Iraq, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania and Yemen. They delegate represented such various specialized ministries as development and economic planning, foreign affairs and international cooperation, social development and labour, local development, administrative development, finance, trade, health and environment, as well as a number of central statistical agencies and central banks.

82. Forty-two representatives of United Nations organizations also attended, as well as 20 representatives from regional and international organizations and 22 representatives of major groups, including the Arab NGO Network for Development, the Arab Forum for Environment and Development, the Arab Network for Environment and Development, the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature, the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship, the Bahrain Women's Association for Human Development, the Jordan Green Building Council, the Federation of Jordanian Women Farmers/Arab Women Farmers Network, Jordanian Friends of Environment, Land and Human to Advocate Progress and a number of private sector participants.

83. The United Nations was represented by most of the member organizations of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, namely the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, UN Women, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Information Centre, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as well as representatives of the International Organization for Migration.

84. The regional organizations that participated included the Arab Labour Organization, the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, the Arab Women's Organization, the Council of Arab Economic Unity, the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, the Arab Women's Centre for Training and Research, the Saudi Fund for Development. Participating international organizations included the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, Transparency International, the Global Green Growth Institute, the Danish Human Rights Institute and others.